Work Stress

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# Abstract

Change is the only constant in this world, and when it comes to the business world, organisational change is an inexorable factor. Owing to the varying customers’ needs and demands, organisations face multifaceted changes. However, a poorly managed change can result in the failure of the smooth functioning of organisation. It can also contribute to workplace stress amid employees eventually impacting job engagement, satisfaction and in worst cases it increases job turnover. This report seeks to discuss the issue of work stress arising from poor organisational change process, its influence on job-related factors, and also recommend strategies to cope up with employees stress.

Contents

[Abstract 2](#_Toc19758105)

[Outline of Structure and Contents of Report 4](#_Toc19758106)

[Statement of Problem of Issue 4](#_Toc19758107)

[Failure of an Organisational Change 5](#_Toc19758108)

[Workplace Stress and its Causes 6](#_Toc19758109)

[Impact of Job Stress on Employee Engagement, Job Satisfaction and Retention 8](#_Toc19758110)

[Recommendations to Leadership on Stress Management of Employees 9](#_Toc19758111)

[Critique of Approach 11](#_Toc19758112)

[References 13](#_Toc19758113)

Work Stress

# Outline of Structure of Report

Owing to the varying customers’ needs and demands, organisations face multifaceted changes. This report has discussed the issue of work stress arising from the poor organisational change process. It first demonstrates the failure of an organisational change program, which resulted in Workplace Stress. All the antecedents of stress are identified from the scenario and their impact on employee engagement, job satisfaction and retention have been examined. In the end, solutions are recommended with rationale and limitations.

# Statement of Problem of Issue

In the scenario under discussion, the IT organisation has gone a major organisational change. The organisation is the biggest one having almost 4000 employees, including the office workers, technical staff and support. The organisation went a major change in terms of restricting the roles and responsibilities and setting the targets steadier. The whole organisation is restructured which is also generally an outcome of the change in organisational needs. The aftermath of this change is the loss of jobs of almost 1000 employees, the high workload for the rest of the employees. In addition, the span of control has increased since the number of managers is same. The managing director who planned and implemented change also left and the new person in lieu of him implemented his own ideas. The new managing director has also changed the leadership team that resulted in a change of everything from the roles and performance targets.

Following issues have been noticed in the following management scenario. The absence of change planning, management and change manager is the key factor that leads to the issues. In addition, rather than bringing about the positive impacts the change has resulted in the redundancy of employees, the high workload on employees, strict management and failure of management in the assignment of roles and responsibilities. The span of control has also increased and all these factors are resulting in employee stress and burnout. The employees are facing high pressure to perform due to the tight deadlines, micromanagement,

# Failure of an Organisational Change

This scenario is an excellent example of the failure of organisational change. The change process has failed due to lack of effective change management technique. Ineffective change with the absence of change management techniques and tools has resulted in employee stress and fatigue. The key to managing organisational change is not an easy process. Unfortunately, because organisations are made up of people and people are unique, there is no right answer to how change can be managed. Every situation is going to be different and requires a different methodology. A top-heavy organisation will require a completely different methodology than a bottom-up organisation or a starfish organisation. While there are some constants, such as the psychological contract and hierarchy of needs, even those change with organisational strategies.

This is where some organisations get into trouble and this is what happened with the organisation under consideration. They fall into the trap of one-size-fits-all. Every person is different and hence each event has a different effect on us as Human Beings and those effects affect the organisations they are part of, in small but definite ways. This is why every organisation is slightly different today than it was yesterday. The question is not if one chooses to change the organisation but rather, will they drive change or will change drive them? It is the managerial choice, whether they drive change toward their mission, vision and enhance their culture or whether you allow change to have its way with you.

Every organisation wants to change according to the needs, and the same went with this organisation as well. The change was brought and implemented. Change efforts fail because they are not co-conceived by teams and there is no buy into the change process (Todnem By, 2005). Most change processes are top driven and employees down the line see them as dictates to be followed against their wishes. A good change manager grabs a halter and tames the beast, making it work toward the mission, vision and goals of the organisation rather than against it. This organisation did not make a consideration to its culture and its people. In addition, change was implemented without any change management and change process. They are feeling frustrated and most of them are also looking forward to quitting the organisation. Working in the organisation that can declare one-third of their employees redundant, is very stressful for them. A number of factors are contributing to the stress of employees in this organisation.

# Workplace Stress and its Causes

Workplace stress is by far one of the most common forms of stress and it is noted to have increased in the past few years. This workplace stress is driven by many factors such as less autonomy with high job demands. The most common causes of stress include high workload, lack of job security, poor work-life balance, and people issues (“Workplace Stress—The American Institute of Stress,” n.d.). One of the major factors in this scenario is job insecurity. This is a crucial issue contributing to stress and anxiety in their workplace. Employees who lack the assurance that their employment will remain stable may suffer from continual stressing thoughts that at any time they may lose their job. Since they have witnessed the layoff of one-third of their peers, and witnessing workplace redundancies or hearing about companies in similar positions closing their doors contribute to these anxious thoughts. Situations like these usually ‘get people talking’. Employees are likely to talk about recent redundancies and will compare themselves to those who have lost their jobs to assess the likelihood of them being next in line. What can make these pressures worse are the opportunities (or lack of) available on the other side. The stress of finding another job should someone lose theirs may cause heightened anxiety due to the thought of being out of work for an unknown amount of time (Størseth, 2006).

Micromanagement of the management style is another driver of workplace stress and it is witnessed that due to the change of leadership and pressure from them, employees are facing trouble. When someone is looking over one’s shoulder and Controlling and redirecting and questioning everything an employee does and the employees are quite able and competent it has a tendency to be demoralizing and lose confidence in their own abilities. Also often with micromanagers, there is an underlying threat of punitive action if an employee doesn't do exactly what they say. The management style reflected in the scenario is the autocratic style and non-cooperative style of the new managers. It also makes the subordinates freak-out since they have no support.

In addition, one more cause of stress here is lack of autonomy. The new management has made changes without asking the employees if they are able to cope up with the workload they are being forced to manage. The changes are imposed on them with strict performance targets. Employees lacking freedom in their job feel blocked mentally, the feeling of having no control over their work makes them stressful (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Rhenen, 2009). Pressure and deadlines, failure to meet the high workload also result in the fatigue and stress at the workplace. Employees now have to manage the workload of the other employees who have left the organisation as well. In addition, the performance targets have been held fixed that they are finding hard to manage. It can also be speculated that the high workload may be disrupting the work-life balance of employees causing them to freak-out.

# Impact of Job Stress on Employee Engagement, Job Satisfaction and Retention

Stress being a negative event has no positive outcomes for the employee suffering and the organisation in which he or she is working. Job stress has a negative impact on the sense of well-being of an employee, and the constant stress results in various health issues among the employees. It is linked with physical health issues such as heart rate, blood pressure, mental fatigue and also negatively impacts metabolism, muscles and respiration. Body and mind respond quickly to stressful events. Poor mental and psychical health reduces employees' performance at the workplace as well. Tired, unhealthy and stressed employees lack productivity and fail to make a positive contribution to their organisation. All these elements become the antecedents to lack of employee engagement, job dissatisfaction, and employees start to think about quitting the job.

A large number of studies link job stress with poor engagement and reduced job satisfaction. A study on Employee Engagement and Job Stress unearths a substantial negative relationship between both the factors (Sharma, n.d.). This study explored the impact of stress on employee engagement variables such as vigour, dedication and absorption. Though engaged employees are a real asset for the company and are imperative for the good performance of an organisation. Job stress is a major threat to employee engagement. An employee who fails to meet the high demands of a job feel stressed and fails to engage actively with their jobs (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007). Stress has a positive relationship with the unfavourable outcomes for both the employee and for the organisation. The employees left out after the layoff of 1000 employees also fell less dedicated have lost their strength due to the pressure of deadlines and targets.

Job stress and job satisfaction have always an inverse relationship as explored by many studies. Stress resulting from a number of factors discussed in the above section result in extreme dissatisfaction from the job. The frequency of job stressors has a high impact on the job satisfaction of an employee (Brewer & McMaha-Landers, 2003). Job stress leads to a drop in productivity, high churn, mistakes, legal liability and a bad reputation. Without knowing the nature of the job, organisation's financials and spread of the problem one cannot even try to give a number. It is evident from the fact that employees are thinking of leaving the organisation, they are no more satisfied. The stress from all the factors discussed above have resulted in lack of job engagement, absence of job satisfaction eventually results in the decision to quit the job. All the researchers studying the impact of job stress suggest implications for addressing job stress since it is a major issue resulting in employee turnover and poor performance of an organisation. In the same way, employees of this IT organisation are also looking forward to quitting the job, as they are already feeling pressurized, they are facing a large span of control and have no autonomy in their job.

# Recommendations to Leadership on Stress Management of Employees

Manager or peers are generally the closest people to notice any stress. This could be a behavioural change like anger or the employee not being able to complete the job tasks. So, firstly people must know that they have to deal with stresses. The first thing to work out is if their stress is the cause or effect of the problem/s. If their stress is reactionary then the need is to address the cause, however, if it is self-made then perhaps the person has to be replaced. Based on the scenario discussed above and the consequences an organisation is facing as a result of the stress issues of employees, stress management is pivotal. Making change happen is an emotional process and needs leaders to engage teams at the head- heart & execution levels that was not done in this case. It can also be understood that the stress employees are facing is reactionary stress. Organisational leaders and managers can play an imperative role in managing the stress of employees.

Being the Organisational Development Manager of the company, it is advised to the Managing Director and the entire leadership team to take care of the well-being of employees. Frustrated employees can not only leave the organisation but will also motivate their peers and the newcomers if any. The profitability and performance of the company are in danger. First of all, leaders have to eliminate the antecedents of stress, all the factors that are the reason for stress in this case. Management has to develop an understanding that stress is a major issue and it has to be dealt as soon as possible to ensure the smooth functioning of the organisation. Management has to be understanding towards the employees who are currently under too much pressured owing to the increased workload. Direct managers have to be aware of the symptoms that some employees are not able to cope up with work pressure and have trouble dealing with job stress.

Employees are currently facing high work-load and less autonomy, therefore, they must be given a sense of empowerment (Kim & Stoner, 2008). Employees must be involved in the decision-making especially when it comes to their deadlines and workload. The understanding attitude of managers is essential to reduce employees stress and fatigue, hence managers must be encouraged to be sympathetic towards the employees. Managers must have an employee assistance program to give professional counselling to the people to enhance their job security. It is also suggested to run leadership and communication training for everyone if you can; focus on different communication and personality styles and what creates stress. Since the organisation has undergone many changes, some policies regarding the mental health promotion should be added and the corporate mission statement must include stress prevention strategies (Goldgruber & Ahrens, 2010).

The workload should be distributed in a manner that the employees can have a balanced approach to manage their tasks. Job demands must be reasonable enough and must be assigned with the manageable deadlines. Employees also need support, clarity about what is expected of them. In addition, since the employees are now managing the work of other employees they must also be paid more according to the added responsibilities they are carrying. Employees should also be given autonomy over their tasks, they must be valued and their individuals' results should also be appreciated. In addition to the strategies recommended above, leaders can provide access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs).

# Critique of Approach

Application of these techniques may not guarantee the complete elimination of job stress. The reputation of the company is disturbed in the eyes of many employees. Not every employee is seeking money or just a salary from the company they work for (Olafsen, Halvari, Forest, & Deci, 2015). Employees who are not intrinsically satisfied with the layoff of 1000 employees may not feel contented with the efforts made my management now. Some of the employees who are optimistic and hopeful can be helped with these strategies of stress management. Some of the employees may have lost these job security and can never feel good working with the same organisation. The only thing that can help management in this regard is to show, not to merely tell that the company cares for their people.

It is also worth mentioning that the strategies may not work if the new leadership team is not very much encouraged to bring a positive change in the company. If they do not really care for the subordinates, they might not implement the strategies in the best possible way. Moreover, the strategies recommended might also impact the culture and traditions of the organisation that has been prevailing from the past one year. The new strategies need strong methods of implementation and active participation of both the management and employees to be successful. The willingness and cooperation of everyone in the organisation are pivotal to bring changes that can reduce work stress and employees can get an environment where they can display best of skills and knowledge.

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